

St. Mary of Egypt



In Cyril of Scythopolis' life of St. Cyryacus, he tells of a woman named Mary found by Cyryacus and his companions living as a hermitess in the Jordanian desert. She told him she had been a famous singer and actress who had sinned and was doing penance in the desert. When they returned, she was dead. Around the story was built an elaborate legend that had tremendous popularity during the Middle Ages according to which she was an Egyptian who went to Alexandria when she was twelve and lived as an actress and courtesan for seventeen years. She was brought to the realization of her evil life before an icon of the Blessed Virgin, and at Mary's direction, went to the desert east of Palestine, where she lived as a hermitess for forty-seven years, not seeing a single human being and beset by all kinds of temptations, which were mitigated by her prayers to the Blessed Virgin. She was discovered about 430 by a holy man named Zosimus, who was impressed by her spiritual knowledge and wisdom. He saw her the following Lent, but when he returned, he found her dead and buried her. When he returned to his monastery near the Jordan, he told the brethren what had happened and the story spread. Her feast day is April 2.